

## US experts in RP for mercury spill cleanup

By DELON PORCALLA

A team of US environmental experts and scientists have arrived in the country to help clean up the Parañaque school mercury spill that exposed students to the toxic substance, a congressman said yesterday.

Parañaque Rep. Eduardo Zialcita said members of the US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) will be coordinating with the Department of Health and Inter-Agency Committee on Environmental Health (IACEH) for the mercury cleanup.

The spill, which occurred during a laboratory experiment last Feb. 16, resulted in the closure of the St. Andrew's School. Classes were transferred to nearby St. Paul's College.

Zialcita said the USEPA arrived upon the invitation of IACEH member Dr. Irma

Macalinao of the UP Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology to assist in the "validation of mercury substance and vapor."

Validation of the substance's presence was conducted by the Royal Haskoning, a group of Dutch experts, along with Philips contractor Globcare.

The lawmaker said school authorities, including the Parents-Teachers Association, have been exerting all effort to clean up the spill in anticipation of the opening of classes next month.

Because of the incident, Zialcita filed a bill that seeks to "prohibit the use, purchase and storage of mercury substance and mercury instruments in all private and public schools and institutions in the country."

"Another unfortunate incident may happen in the future if no legislation is carried out to ban the use of this substance in schools. This is an important step to protect our children's health from the dangers of mercury pollution and contamination in schools," he said.

Experts have warned that mercury is an extremely toxic substance that can harm human health and wildlife.

Those exposed to it can suffer mental problems and impaired vision, speech, hearing and coordination.

"High levels can damage the brain, kidney, lungs and can be fatal. Fetuses and young children are specially at risk because of their developing nervous systems," Zialcita said.

## Painting contest on migration to Hawaii launched

The National Commission on Culture and Arts (NCCA) and

By EVELYN MACAIRAN

number of Filipinos who have

mained affected by "myths and misconceptions" surrounding the use of condoms. He was referring to complaints that condoms diminish sexual pleasure or break easily.

"They still don't think that once they use condoms, they will be protected," she said.

With Kris Bayos

## Bill filed seeking ban on mercury in all RP schools

By Philip C. Tubeza

SMARTING FROM THE MERCURY SPILL THAT downed 11 students in his district last February, Parañaque Rep. Eduardo Zialcita yesterday filed a bill proposing a total ban on mercury in public and private schools.

This developed as experts from the US Environmental Protection Agency arrived last week, with the help of industrialist Lucio Tan, to "clean up" the mercury spill at the St. Andrew's School in Parañaque before the new school year starts next month.

Zialcita filed the proposed "Safe Schools Mercury Reduction Act of 2006" which would prohibit the use, purchase and storage of mercury substance and mercury instruments in all private and public schools and institutions in the country, including thermometers.

"Another unfortunate incident may happen in the future if no legislation is carried out to ban the use of this substance in all schools. This legislation is an important step to protect our children's health from the dangers of mercury pollution and contamination in schools," Zialcita said in a statement.

The proposed bill would ban also from educational institutions "any instrument which contains mercury including, but not limited to, thermometers, barometers, sphygmomanometers and manometers."

Zialcita noted that environmental experts consider mercury as an extremely toxic substance that can harm human health and wildlife "even at very low levels."

Eleven high school students from St. Andrew's were hospitalized after mercury was accidentally spilled in the school's science laboratory on Feb. 16.

Last week, a team of scientists and experts from the USEPA arrived in Parañaque to assist in the mercury cleanup. The US experts will assist in the validation of mercury substance and vapor. The cleanup was done free of charge by Royal Haskoning, a group of Dutch experts from Netherlands and Philips' contractor Globcare.

Businessman Lucio Tan, a known civic supporter in community service, and Zialcita provided the airfare and hotel accommodations of the American experts through Philippine Airlines and Century Park Sheraton respectively.

Parañaque City Mayor Jun Bernabe has purchased the Lumex machine which will be used in the long term monitoring mercury levels in the school's premises.



Aling Beatriz. Just one of the place to live. Through our "Ma make dreams happen for people Libjo, Batangas City with its "rain the needy. It is our way of helping 700,000 homes in 7,000 communi

